



By Vince Carrig
Sports Writer

North Platte quarterback Shane O'Connor scored touchdowns from 11, 19, and 28 yards away and St. Pat's defense kept Plainsmen drives short for a 49-14 Irish victory in Grant Friday night.

After ripping off a 30-yard run in the same drive, O'Connor faked a handoff to running back Thatcher Vap and ran 11 yards up the left side to give St. Pat's the lead it would never relinquish with 9:17 elapsed.

On the Plainsmen's next drive, O'Connor stripped a ball carrier and Vap picked up the grounded ball. Vap saw nothing but Nebraska sunset, and since its eligibility expired long ago, the sunset did not tackle him and he raced 44 yards for a 14-0 North Platte lead with 2:09 left in the first quarter.

After the Irish defense pinned Perkins County deep in their own end and forced a punt on their next drive, O'Connor struck again. In business at the Plainsmen 36, O'Connor gobbled up most of the yards St. Pat's needed with an eight-yard rush and a 19-yard score.

The senior quarterback dragged a tackler three yards and lunged to the goal line in his second, more difficult effort.

The Plainsmen's only real highlight and hope came in the second quarter, as quarterback Michael York threw a ball 30 yards to an open Erik Hagan, who turned around and ran 30 more yards untouched for a 60-yard touchdown score.

At 6:04 of the second quarter, the Plainsmen trailed by 14 points.

Burly sophomore fullback Andrew Vinton retaliated, however, with a 75-yard drive of his own. Gaining all but five of the yards the Irish needed, Vinton capped the last scoring drive of the half with a 20-yard rumble that gave St. Pat's a 28-7 halftime lead.

The Irish ran for all 339 yards they gained; their two passes fell incomplete.

Vinton led the visitors with 134 yards, followed by O'Connor's 99 yards and gaudy 12.4 yards/carry average.

The Irish choked off the Plainsmen's first drive of the second half, then let Vap take over.

Vap found overdrive after slipping a tackler in the defensive backfield and angling for the corner of the end zone and a 40-yard touchdown halfway through the third quarter.

O'Connor then saluted cornerback Matthew Jensen for his one-handed interception that killed the Plainsmen's next drive by taking off for a 28-yard touchdown run from scrimmage.

The naked bootleg left salted the game away for North Platte with 13:57 left.

Running backs Keaton Hope and Alex Johnston traded "scout team" touchdowns to complete the game's scoring in the fourth quarter.

The Irish defense limited Plainsmen leading rusher Nick Turner to 40 yards, and York (usually a threat with the option play) to 16 yards.

O'Connor proved difficult to tackle all night. Early in the first quarter, though, O'Connor curiously slipped cornerback Brody Prante's tackle when whatever material that hung from the bottom of his jersey tore away, leaving Prante with a handful of material but no O'Connor.

Score by quarter

Irish 14 14 14 7 —49

Plainsmen 0 7 0 7 —14

Team/Quarter/Time/Play

NP 1 2:43 O'Connor 11 run (Johng kick)

NP 1 2:09 Vap 44 fumble return (Johng kick)

NP 2 10:51 O'Connor 19 run (Johng kick)

PC 2 6:04 York 60 pass to Hagan, E. (Hagan, J. kick)

NP 2 4:44 Vinton 20 run (Johng kick)

NP 3 6:09 Vap 40 run (Johng kick)

NP 3 1:57 O'Connor 28 run (Johng kick)

NP 4 9:11 Hope 3 run (Niessen kick)

PC 4 0:31 Johnston 4 run (Hagan, J. kick)